THE ORDEAL

In *The Boston!ans. The Princess Casamassima, The Reverberator,* and *The Tragic Muse,* the awakened self of the Jamesian protagonist faces an ordeal, in which he is required to make a choice between the possibilities of his own self and those of the world outside. Discovering no integrity in the world outside, he falls back upon the resources of his own self and reaffirms its integrity.

In *The Bostonians* and *The Princess Casamassima,* in which Henry James reveals his social awareness, he continues to deal with the theme of self-knowledge and refinement, but now in an atmosphere of reform and revolution. In these two novels, he dramatises the conflict in individuals who have committed themselves to causes to which they are, by their very natures, opposed. Loyalty to the cause would invariably mean self-betrayal, which is worse than suicide for the Jamesian protagonists.

The theme of *The Bostonians* is the progression of the simple and good-natured Verena towards self-knowledge and refinement. The charm and goodness of Verena make her pre-eminently eligible for rescue from the life to which she has committed herself. Her devotion to the feminist cause is more the result of her unwillingness to displease Olive than of her sincere conviction. But for Olive, Verena would not have cared very much for female suffrage. Endowed by nature with a beautiful smile, "which fell impartially on every one, man and woman alike", and by nature "enchantingly and universally genial/'[1] Verena is committed to a cause which is fundamentally anti-male, and which is thus an attempt on her part to hoodwink her own nature. In trying to be what she is not, Verena is unfaithful to her own nature. She assumes a'rnask for the sake of a movement, which

by itself is not a bad one, but becomes perverse in the hands of eccentrics and neurotics like Mrs. Farrinder, Olive Chancellor and Ada T. P. Foat. Henry James is not so much repudiating reform as exposing how 'reform degenerates into a moronic pursuit of vulgar excitement, when it is championed by deluded and repressed Jrttfrvitfuals,